

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
STATEMENT OF FINDINGS**

**CONEMAUGH RIVER LAKE
EASEMENT FOR PIPELINE CROSSING AND TREATED WATER
DISCHARGE
BLACKLICK CREEK
BLACKLICK TOWNSHIP
INDIANA COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

Belden and Blake Corporation proposes to construct a discharge pipeline and outfall across Federally-managed land at Conemaugh River Lake. The pipeline and outfall are for the purpose of discharging treated groundwater into Blacklick Creek. The groundwater is a residual product from dewatering coal seams during the process of methane gas extraction from several coalbed methane wells operated by Belden and Blake on privately-owned land in the vicinity. Currently, Belden and Blake is pumping the groundwater from these wells to the Howard Treatment Facility, approximately three miles to the southeast. A new water treatment facility is proposed to be constructed on private land approximately 1000 feet west of the proposed pipeline. The maximum discharge capacity of this facility will be 600,000 gallons per day. A NPDES Permit was obtained from the State authorizing the discharge into Blacklick Creek. An easement will be required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the proposed pipeline and outfall in Blacklick Township, Indiana County, Pennsylvania.

The proposed pipeline will travel across Federal land for approximately 228 feet and will parallel an unnamed tributary. A six-inch diameter pipeline will be used initially to cross Federal land to the top of a forested hillside. Belden and Blake then proposes to use a 12-inch diameter corrugated plastic pipe to pass the design flow at a depth and velocity to reduce the potential for freezing in the pipe from the top of the hillside to the outfall location at Blacklick Creek, where the ground is rocky and less soil cover is attainable.

In connection with the easement to be provided by the Pittsburgh District Corps of Engineers to Belden and Blake Corporation for the proposed pipeline crossing and outfall, a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared by the principal's consultant, GAI Consultants, Inc., and was coordinated with the appropriate agencies and the public. As part of the preparation of the EA, coordination was undertaken with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for compliance with the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and the Endangered Species Act. No Federally-listed species are known to occur within the proximity of the proposed pipeline and outfall; therefore, no environmental impacts are likely. Coordination with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, and the Pennsylvania Department of

Conservation and Natural Resources revealed that no Commonwealth-listed species are known to occur in the pipeline crossing and outfall area. No environmental impacts to any Commonwealth-listed species are likely to occur.

Design of the pipeline and outfall will comply with all applicable environmental laws. Coordination under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been completed. Coordination under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Historic Preservation has been completed. It was determined that although there is a high probability that prehistoric and historic archaeological resources are located in the project area, the proposed activity should have no effect on prehistoric or historical archaeological resources. In addition, no evaluation of historic structures was deemed necessary.

In July of 2004, a copy of the EA was furnished to the Indiana Free Library in Indiana, the Blairsville Public Library in Blairsville, and the Saltsburg Free Library in Saltsburg. Notification in writing was given to the Indiana Gazette announcing that copies of the EA were available for public review. No comments on the EA have been received from the public. This FONSI will be posted on the Pittsburgh District website for public viewing.

An alternative to the proposed pipeline crossing and outfall was considered. This alternative would involve a discharge into Stewart Run, a small tributary to Blacklick Creek. In this instance, an easement from the Corps of Engineers would not be required. This alternative was rejected due to the lack of consistent flow in Stewart Run, and the unlikelihood of obtaining a NPDES permit from the state. The no action alternative was also considered and rejected because it would not alleviate the adverse flow conditions developing in the pipelines and at the present treatment facility.

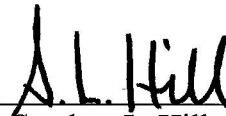
Potential impacts of the pipeline and outfall construction and operation were assessed with regard to water quality, wetlands, vegetation, terrestrial habitat, fish and wildlife, endangered and threatened species, flood plains, land use, soil erosion and sedimentation, recreation, soils and geology, scenic rivers and streams, aesthetics, socio-economic considerations and cultural resources. As indicated in the EA, relatively temporary and/or minimal impacts will result from the proposed action. Cumulative impacts will be minimal. The NPDES permit defines effluent limitations of the discharge, and requires periodic monitoring. Although wetlands immediately adjacent to Blacklick Creek will be impacted during construction of the pipeline, these impacts will be temporary only. Cumulative impacts will be minimal.

Based on an evaluation of the EA, it is my opinion that, for the reasons stated in the EA and above, the conveyance of an easement to Belden and Blake for the pipeline and outfall at Conemaugh River Lake is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. The proposed action is one that would not normally require an Environmental Impact Statement.

Considering all beneficial and detrimental aspects relating to this work, I have reasonably determined that there will not be any significant adverse environmental impacts and that the public interest will be best served by the granting of an easement for the construction and operation of the outfall pipeline at Conemaugh River Lake. Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement under the National Environmental Policy Act is not warranted. The Environmental Assessment has been circulated for review to the concerned agencies. It has also been made available to the general public as indicated above. This FONSI will be made available on the District website. My final decision on the proposed action to provide an easement to the Belden and Blake Corporation for construction and operation of the proposed pipeline at Conemaugh River Lake will follow.

30 September 2004

Date



Stephen L. Hill

Colonel, Corps of Engineers

District Engineer